

The Marion County Internet Library and E-Books: The Experience of a Multi-type Library Consortium

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Background

The Marion County Internet Library is a project of the Indianapolis Library Partners funded by the Indianapolis Foundation Library Fund. Indianapolis acquired a unique resource in 1989 when an anonymous bequest of nearly \$15 million was made to create an endowment to support the public, high school, and academic libraries in Marion County.ⁱ The fund has grown over the years and now provides approximately \$1.5 million a year for programs that support the Indianapolis Library Partners.ⁱⁱ

The largest current program of the Indianapolis Library Partners is the Marion County Internet Library that began in June of 1998 with a two-year grant. The project has continued on a series of grants. It purchases and supports the use of electronic resources for all of the public, school, and academic libraries in Marion County. The annual budget for the project has varied, but has been approximately \$500,000 per year.ⁱⁱⁱ The project was managed by a steering committee of librarians and has hired a part-time consultant for training and support. Most of the content purchased for the Marion County Internet Library is standard databases.

History of the Project

In the spring of 1999 at the ARCL conference in Detroit one of the members of the steering committee visited the netLibrary booth. He was convinced that e-books would be a good addition to the Marion County Internet Library's collection, but the purchase model initially offered did not work. The Marion County Internet Library had no staff that could select titles and because the project was funded by grants it could not make long-term commitments. In addition, even though at this time netLibrary was trying to make e-books act just like printed books, it did not seem to make sense to purchase e-books in anticipation of use when it was technically possible to purchase them only when then the e-book was actually being used. Since it has long been understood that most of the use of a book collection is generated by a small percentage of the collection — the 80/20 rule — and that the best predictor of the future use of a title is past use, the ability to purchase only needed books at the time of need should be more efficient than selecting titles in the traditional manner.^{iv}

It was hoped that by providing a collection of mostly scholarly e-books to all the libraries in the county that we could efficiently add high quality content, particularly to the high school libraries.

Negotiations between netLibrary and the Marion County Internet Library led to a user-driven purchase model, what netLibrary now calls a PDA or Patron Driven Acquisitions model. In the beginning the whole netLibrary collection was available to the libraries in Marion County but a title would be purchased only when it was used. In exchange for the ability to purchase only with use, the Marion County Internet Library committed to purchase a set dollar amount, and to set up a deposit account to simplify the accounting. The arrangement began in September 1999. The Marion County Internet Library was among netLibrary's first customers and may have been the first to use the user-driven purchase model. At this time access to the collection was only through the netLibrary interface.

One early side benefit of our netLibrary arrangement was that they were convinced to add the *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* to their collection. The Marion County Internet Library project had been investigating ways of making the content in this title available electronically to our membership. All of the available alternatives would have cost at least \$50,000. We were able to purchase several copies in netLibrary for less than \$200. This is our most used book with over 800 accesses.^v

Statistics for the project are shown below.

	Accesses	Titles Purchased	Cost	Cost per Access
September 1999 - June 2000	1,217	767	\$41,753	\$34.31
July 2000 - June 2001	3,311	2,139	\$113,309	\$34.22
July 2001 - June 2002	16,255	2,193	\$122,845	\$7.56
July 2002 - June 2003	26,585	2,181	\$110,700	\$4.16
July 2003 - June 2004	29,403	2,065	\$113,497	\$3.86
July 2004 - June 2005	38,610	2,021	\$100,000	\$2.59
July 2005 - June 2006	50,069	1,913	\$106,100	\$2.12
July 2006 - December 2006	21,359	0	\$0	\$0.00
Total	186,809	13,279	\$708,204	\$3.79

In the first year and a half use was not impressive. In the spring of 2001 we loaded bibliographic records for the collection into the catalog of the Indianapolis Marion County Public Library (IMCPL). Use increased significantly. Unfortunately, so did the number of purchases and we ran out of money. In June and July of 2001 we made no purchases and had a large number of bibliographic records that included dead links in the IMCPL catalog. This caused a large number of user complaints. In the next year, we

renegotiated with netLibrary for multiple trigger purchasing and adjusted our profile. For the next several years, use increased and we managed to stay within our budget with some tweaking of the profile. In two years the full deposit account was not spent and titles that had some use, but had not reached the purchase trigger were selected for the collection to fill out our expenditure obligation. We also loaded the bibliographic records for the titles we had purchased into the catalogs of several of the other libraries. In essence we purchased from one catalog and then all of the libraries benefited from these purchases. Unfortunately, the high school libraries who had the most to gain were not among those who loaded records as it turned out that this was more difficult than had been anticipated. In the spring of 2004 we once again ran out of money and the profile was modified. Because of the demands of record management, in July of 2005 the management of the project was moved from the IMCPL to the University Library at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). The profile was modified towards a more academic collection and the bibliographic records were loaded into the IUPUI catalog. It should be noted that managing records in a user-driven purchase model is both critical to the success of the model and can be complex.

In 2006 netLibrary, because of pressure from publishers, changed their policies concerning consortium purchases. They moved from the common purchase of single books, which could be shared, to a model that required the purchase of multiple copies of books with the multiple being determined by the size of the consortium. We could not reach an acceptable arrangement with netLibrary based on this policy and we ended our purchase of netLibrary titles at the end of June of 2006. However, as noted in the chart above, the consortium still owns 13,279 titles and in the last six months of 2006 they received considerable use.

Throughout the project training on the collection was provided as part of the training on the whole database package offered by the Marion County Internet Library. While we cannot be certain, it appears though that most of the use was driven by the records in catalogs.

Observations on the Use of the Collection

It is difficult to summarize other experience, but several things stand out:

1. The use of the collection nearly followed the standard 80/20 rule. In fact, 10% of the collection generated about 53% of the accesses and 70% of the accesses were generated by 20% of the collection.
2. What is different with a user driven purchase model with a multiple purchase trigger is that not all the used titles are purchased. In our case only approximately 50% of the 27,688 used titles were purchased. The purchased titles generated approximately 90% of the use. If we had purchased all of the used titles our expenditures would have approximately doubled. While our profile changed over the years, it generally included about 50,000 titles. Our users had potential access

- to 50,000 titles of which half were used and only a quarter were purchased. This shows the clear efficiency of this type of arrangement and the potential of electronic content when it is used in a way that takes advantage of the fact that it can be delivered differently from print.
3. The use of e-books was substantive. Special statistics run for us by netLibrary indicated that over the period from July 2002 to March 2005 the average access generated nearly 15 page views.
 4. The purchased titles were heavily used even after the purchase program ceased. From July to December 2006 there were 21,359 accesses. While this was about 14% less than the same period in 2005, it still represents an average use per title of 1.6 accesses. Five titles were accessed 100 or more times and 408 were accessed ten or more times.
 5. At the beginning much of the use of the collection was for computer and technology titles. As time went on the use was balanced across a wide variety of disciplines. A closer look at use reveals several surprising findings:
 - a. The “other” category, which contains about 2% of the titles accounted for 7% of the accesses. “Other” primarily consists of romance novels. We stopped purchasing these titles half way through the project, but they continue to among the most used titles in the collection. This would seem to indicate that at least some people will read novels on computers
 - b. The project purchased 355 “Complete Idiots Guides”. This 1% of the collection generated a little less than 4% of the accesses. This is an example of the strong use of reference materials.
 - c. A similar example was that about 20 titles in the “medical” category were accessed over 100 times. These were primarily study guides for medical students. Similarly several “library science” titles were among the most used titles in the collection. They were probably being used for distance education courses offered at IUPUI.

Conclusion

The e-book experience of the Marion County Internet Library, particularly the use of a user-drive purchase model with a multiple trigger, demonstrates that e-book content can be delivered effectively and at a reasonable cost. This can be done in a way that takes advantage of the nature of electronic content — it can be purchased and delivered instantaneously. Unfortunately, the current netLibrary treatment of consortiums makes this significantly less economical. In the future, it will be important for libraries, publishers, and intermediaries to explore different models so that a balanced model can be found that maximizes the benefit that e-books can provide to library users.

The trick of managing a user-driven purchase model is to balance the exposure of the collection, which generates use and thus purchases, with the amount of money that is available. This places the risk on the library or consortium. If you generate too many purchases you either have to cut off access, and potentially remove records from your catalog, or find more money. While this can be tricky the Marion County Internet Library experience indicates that with practice it can be done.

Notes

ⁱ The City of Indianapolis and Marion County are technically not exactly the same, but for the purposes of the projects describe in this article they are equivalent and the names will be used interchangeably.

ⁱⁱ For background on the Indianapolis Library Partners see: Champlin, Connie, Carole Gall and David W. Lewis, "The Indianapolis Foundation Library Partners," *Indiana Libraries* 23(1):11-15 2004.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a description of the project see: Bevilacqua, Ann, Lynn Hobbs and David W. Lewis, "The Marion County Internet Library," *Indiana Libraries*, 18(Supplement 1):33-35 1999.

^{iv} The classic studies on book use that demonstrate these points include: Herman H. Fussler and Julian Simon, *Patterns in the Use of Books in Large research Libraries*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961; Michael K. Buckland, *Book Availability and the Library User*, New York: Pergamon Press, Inc., 1975, and Daniel Gore, editor, *Farewell to Alexandria: Solutions to Space, Growth, and Performance Problems of Libraries*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976 particularly Richard Trueswell's chapter, "Growing Libraries: Who Needs Them? A Statistical Basis for the No-Growth Collection."

^v Unless otherwise indicated use statistics are for September 1999 through December 2006.